

Mortuary operators accused of thefts

PASADENA (AP) — The operators of a mortuary, linked to an illegal crematorium, have been accused of stealing body parts, falsifying death certificates, and filching gold teeth from corpses.

Two of the operators were also charged with embezzling interest from prepaid funeral accounts.

The charges, filed Friday by the Pasadena district attorney's office, target the owner-operators of Lamb Funeral Home in Pasadena and Coastal International Eye and Tissue Bank, which has ceased operation.

Laurieanne Lamb-Sconce, Jerry Sconce, and their son, David Wayne Sconce, were charged with 41 varying criminal counts, most of them felonies.

Nearly three years ago, the Sconces proposed to construct a large crematorium near Shafter.

Responding to the protests of area residents, Kern County Supervisors denied permits to allow the crematorium project.

In the charges filed Friday, the trio are accused of allegedly removing body parts without the consent of surviving relatives, performing multiple cremations, and mixing human ashes.

Officials alleged the mortuary and tissue bank removed and sold brains, bones, corneas, gold teeth

and organs without consent from next-of-kin.

Laurieanne Lamb-Sconce and Jerry Sconce were also charged with embezzling \$100,000 in interest from 172 prepaid funeral trust accounts.

By law, funeral home operators may receive 2½ percent of the interest for expenses, said Deputy District Attorney Walt Lewis. "They took all of it," he said.

David Sconce, reached at his second home in Bullhead City, Ariz., said the charges were "a bunch of crap."

Referring to charges the family removed tissues without permission, he said, "We got consent from every one of them. It was right there in black and white. Everyone who had tissue taken off had the release."

The parts went to research labs or schools, he said.

Laurieanne Lamb-Sconce and Jerry Sconce, also now living in Arizona, could not be reached for comment.

The charges culminate a month-long investigation of Lamb Funeral Home records, begun after San Bernardino County authorities in January raided Oscar Ceramics, which was operating as a secret crematorium in Hesperia, about 90 miles east of Pasadena.